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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 001081

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [MR](#)  
SUBJECT: PRDR: RE-BRANDED, BUT STILL AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE  
(C-AL6-01339)

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[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 993

Classified By: CDA Steven Koutsis, Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

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(C) Summary  
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-- Despite significant and continuing challenges, the PRDR (Taya's former political party) remains a top contender for municipal, legislative, and presidential elections.

-- PRDR's greatest strengths are its organizational and funding superiority over all other parties, and the fact that it remains the most recognized political party, with most voters knowing little about the other 34 contenders.

-- If the PRDR leadership is to be believed, all the Taya loyalists "who could not accept change" have left the party, leaving pro-democracy reformers at the helm.

-- However, regardless of its re-branding efforts, nearly all Mauritians still perceive the PRDR as Taya's party, and this may hurt PRDR candidates attempting to separate themselves from the former regime.

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(C) Comments  
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-- The PRDR has been fairly silent since the coup, while other parties have been grabbing headlines and attracting new candidates and voters (ref B).

-- The municipal and legislative elections will be the real test for the future of the PRDR. There are three possible outcomes:

1 - The PRDR wins an absolute majority. The party would then likely make power-sharing deals with other leading parties in exchange for support for PRDR's presidential candidate.

2 - The PRDR performs well, but does not gain a majority. The party would likely look towards a coalition with other strong parties in the race to the presidency.

3 - The PRDR's candidates are snubbed by voters. This would force the party underground, where it would look for ways to secretly influence the presidential outcome, such as through financing an independent candidate.

End Summary and Comments.

¶1. (C) Following the August 2005 coup, former president Taya's political party (The Democratic and Social Republican Party - PRDS) lost a significant amount of members, power, and influence (ref A). Parliament, which PRDS dominated, was dissolved, and the new transitional government took several steps, including the temporary freezing of party assets, to limit the influence of this body of potential Taya supporters. Meanwhile, the party struggled with infighting and an effort to redefine itself, eventually changing their name to the Republican Party for Democracy and Renewal (PRDR) (ref A). Despite these challenges, the party remains extremely strong, and is considered by many to be a top contender for the municipal, legislative, and presidential elections.

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PRDR'S STRENGTHS  
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¶2. (C) PRDR's greatest strengths remain its organizational and funding superiority over all other political parties. PRDR has offices in each of Mauritania's 13 regions, as well as in most of the heavily populated towns; while a vast majority of other parties have only one or two offices. Estimates of PRDR's assets vary, however, most political observers agree that they have significantly more resources

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than do all other parties combined. These advantages were amassed during PRDS' long reign in power, when Taya used his position to enrich himself, and the party he controlled.

¶3. (C) Another clear advantage is PRDR's name recognition and experience. Even with their name change, PRDR remains the most recognized political party in Mauritania, with most voters knowing little about the other 34 parties. PRDR candidates dominated nearly all municipal councils and both houses of Parliament under Taya. Even with the high rate of PRDR defections (ref A), most candidates with political experience were, or still are, PRDR members. In a recent meeting with the Charge, the political party Union for Democracy and Progress president Naha Mint Mouknass explained that "people will vote for the PRDR because they don't know anything else," adding that "the majority of the country is still living under the old reality of Taya and the PRDR."

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PRDR'S WEAKNESS - AND ITS STRUGGLE TO ADDRESS IT  
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¶4. (C) PRDR's name recognition is also its greatest weakness. Regardless of its re-branding efforts, for nearly all Mauritaniens, PRDR remains Taya's party. This association is likely to hurt PRDR candidates attempting to separate themselves from the old regime.

¶5. (C) The new PRDR leadership is well aware of this weakness, and takes every opportunity to draw a distinction between the old PRDS and the new PRDR. "This is a completely different party," PRDR Secretary General Ikrin Ould Mohamed Vall told Charge in a September 5 meeting. "The old party was about one man, while the new party is about all Mauritaniens," Mohamed Vall said, adding that "everything has changed, from our new leadership, to our party policies, to our platform and principles."

¶6. (C) Mohamed Vall explained that following PRDR's October 2005 party congress (ref A), "those who wanted to keep the old party, those who were opposed to our new plan, left the

party and began criticizing us...but they were criticizing the old PRDR, not the new party we have today." Mohamed Vall added that "while several parties have formed a coalition (The Coalition of Forces for Democratic Change) to oppose the PRDR in the coming elections...the coalition is not strong and many of its members are talking with us about partnerships."

¶7. (C) The true impact of PRDR's association with Taya will not be known until after the municipal and legislative elections. If PRDR candidates do well, the party will likely have significant strength heading towards presidential elections in March. If on the other hand PRDR's candidates are rejected by voters, the PRDR will likely look for alternative means to influence the presidential elections.

¶8. (C) While Mohamed Vall works hard to give the impression of a new and unified PRDR, continued infighting and defections pose a constant threat to the political viability of party.

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ELECTORAL PROSPECTS  
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¶9. (C) At present it is difficult to know how PRDR's candidates will do in municipal and legislative elections. More will be known after candidate lists are formally submitted between September 20 and 30 for municipal elections, and October 3 to the 18 for legislative elections. As for presidential prospects, the municipal and legislative elections will likely indicate whether PRDR's significant advantages outweigh the voters' distaste for Taya.

¶10. (C) Mohamed Vall assured Charge that the PRDR would be running its own presidential candidate, saying that the nomination would occur during PRDR's party congress in December. However, independent presidential hopeful Dahane Ould Ahmed Mahmoud told Charge that even if PRDR polls well in municipal and legislative elections, that "there

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association with Taya will make them unlikely to win the presidency." Dahane explained that "there is an air of change throughout Mauritania, and the people do not want another Taya." He said that instead, the PRDR would look to support an independent candidate, such as himself.

¶11. (C) However, if PRDR candidates are poorly received in November, the party could consider forming a coalition or look towards some other tactic to influence the elections. Koutsis